

Karl Brooks/R7/USEPA/US

10/30/2012 04:26 PM

To Rich Hood

cc Cecilia Tapia, Mark Hague

bcc

Subject Re: fire at landfill

I have directed CT to assemble basic facts on: whether MDNR has ever requested EPA assist (she believes it hasn't); date on which MDNR assumed primacy/lead under RCRA for landfills and significance of that assumption (OPA needs to work with S/f to have 2 or 3 clear sentences on that should media want to know more about "lead role" for state). S/f has been aware of SSO for some time, in ordinary course of working with PRP and MDNR, but as P-D story indicates, EPA does not deem SSO a threat to rad waste, and CT believes it will not delay or compromise our ongoing water testing and upcoming gamma testing. If MDNR is in fact legally and practically responsible for this SSO effort, then EPA's media role is distinctly secondary and responsive.

OPA and S/f need to cooperate closely in coming days to ensure facts are supplied if media wants more, and that they reflect current S/f input.

I want to get new STL area media about fire as soon as they appear, if they do. Don't know why Mark and I didn't get these this morning.

tx

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Rich Hood

[Rising landfill temperatures threatening undergr...](#)

10/30/2012 04:01:08 PM

From: Rich Hood/R7/USEPA/US
To: Karl Brooks/R7/USEPA/US@EPA
Date: 10/30/2012 04:01 PM
Subject: fire at landfill

Rising landfill temperatures threatening underground nuclear waste

by Ray Preston / News 4
KMOV.com

Posted on October 29, 2012 at 4:49 PM
Updated yesterday at 7:00 PM

BRIDGETON, Mo (KMOV.com) -- News 4 viewers reported a terrible smell coming from a landfill in Bridgeton. After investigation it seems the problem may be more than just a foul odor.

The Pattonville Fire Department says what's causing the smell is an underground problem that's growing and there are worries it may reach radioactive waste buried nearby.

The landfill is on St. Charles Rock Road, west of Lambert Airport. It's operated by Republic Services, a company based in Phoenix.

Residents complained not only about a terrible odor, but also that there was something in the air that burned their eyes, causing them headaches.

What's happening underground at the Bridgeton landfill is known as "subsurface oxidation." It means that what's below the surface is decomposing, which creates heat.

Republic has been drilling wells to allow gases and vapors to escape, but the Pattonville Fire Department says temperature readings on the well-heads show a dramatic increase over a three-month period.

And it's unclear just what is churning below the surface.

"The things that we would be concerned with would be production of toxic gasses or flammable gasses," said Assistant Chief Matt LaVanchy.

Some say it's an eclectic concoction made up of everything from household garbage to industrial chemicals to jet fuel that was dumped there years ago.

The landfill is in an old limestone quarry, which means it's surrounded by a natural barrier.

The heat and vapors are currently growing and moving southwest, but LaVanchy says he's concerned because on the north end of the landfill there is radioactive waste and there is nothing to act as a barrier.

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Hot spot, fumes prompt concern at Bridgeton landfill

10/30/12 • [By JEFFREY TOMICH jtomich@post-dispatch.com314-340-8320](mailto:By%20JEFFREY%20TOMICH%20jtomich%40post-dispatch.com314-340-8320)

BRIDGETON • Pattonville fire officials are concerned about rising underground temperatures at a north St. Louis County landfill and an odor that's generating complaints from people who live and work in the area.

Matt LaVanchy, assistant chief of the Pattonville Fire Department, said temperatures in one section of the inactive Bridgeton Sanitary Landfill have reached 190 degrees and a 40-foot

section of ground has collapsed.

Noxious fumes that are bothering residents come from wells drilled in the landfill to deal with the buildup of heat, he said.

While problems at the landfill, just north of Lambert-St. Louis International Airport, have worsened recently, they are not new.

Problems began in January 2011, when the Missouri Department of Natural Resources reported that data from monitoring equipment at the site indicated high levels of carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide and low levels of methane and oxygen — conditions that indicated a subsurface fire.

DNR said at the time that the fire was believed to be located deep within the south central portion of the landfill, 100 to 150 feet below the surface, and posed no threat to public health.

The agency also said the fire wasn't threatening the nearby West Lake Landfill Superfund site, where Cold War-era radioactive waste is buried.

A DNR spokeswoman wasn't available Monday to answer questions about the cause of the elevated carbon monoxide readings.

Susan David, a spokeswoman for Phoenix-based Republic Services, which runs the landfill, said the company is working to upgrade the gas management system at the landfill because the waste is decomposing faster than normal. The construction work has resulted in more odor than usual. Last weekend, she said, a gas pipe was damaged, adding to the odor.

As for the collapsed of part of the landfill, she said, "We aren't seeing anything alarming. All landfills settle as they decompose."

Chris Whitley, an Environmental Protection Agency spokesman, said the agency was aware of the situation but that slow-burning underground fires aren't uncommon and there was no threat to the federal Superfund site.

LaVanchy, a member of St. Louis County's hazardous materials response team, said he's spoken with Republic Services and reviewed the company's plans for addressing the heat buildup. The company has told him there's no fire at the landfill, but rather a condition known as "subsurface oxidation."

"We've got a lot of questions," he said. "It's just a matter of trying to understand what's really going on, what potentially could happen and how to manage that."

Among the concerns, LaVanchy said, is what happens if the temperature continues to rise, or the landfill is exposed to oxygen. He's also worried what happens if the problem migrates to the northeast, toward the radioactive waste.

“We could potentially have a very serious situation,” he said.

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